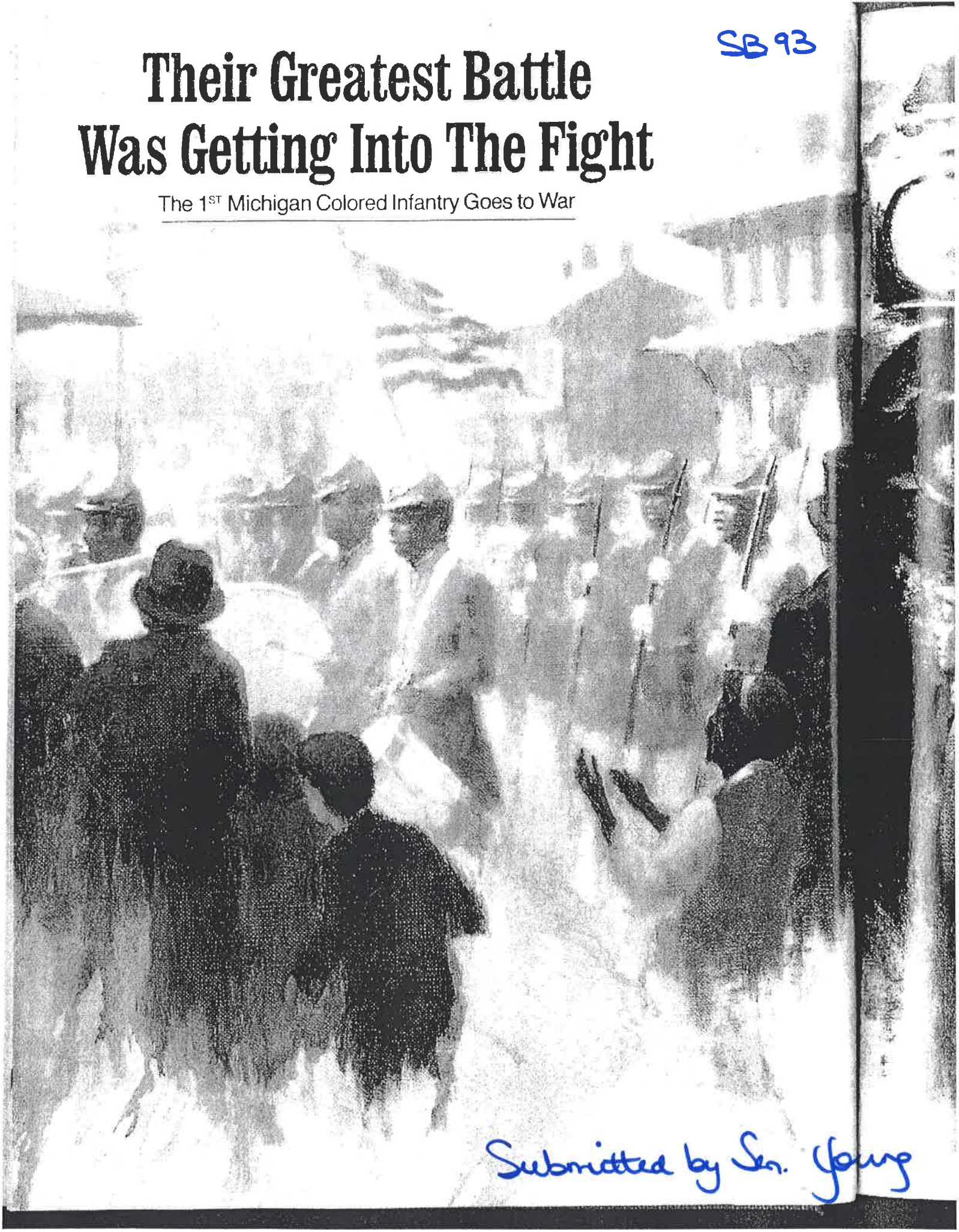
SB 93

Their Greatest Battle Was Getting Into The Fight

The 1ST Michigan Colored Infantry Goes to War



Submitted by Sen. Young

Thousands of volumes have been written about the Civil War, but the complete contributions by blacks are not generally known by most Americans. During, and even long after the war, only a handful of publications noted their involvement; school textbooks pointedly and consistently omitted references to them. Meanwhile, white officers and enlisted men wrote books and stories for magazines and newspapers about their units and heroic experiences, most of which were widely read. Relatively few such tomes were written about black soldiers.

When the Civil War began, President Abraham Lincoln issued the first of many calls for voluntary enlistments. All the troops raised were white. This was not because black men refused to apply—hundreds of free men appeared at recruiting stations but found the doors closed to them.

by Hondon Hargrove
Illustrated by Stewart C. Ashlee

As the war progressed, abolitionist organizations offered to aid in raising black regiments. Frederick Douglass claimed he could raise an army of 10,000 slaves and freedmen within thirty days. Similar offers were made in Washington, DC, New York, Cleveland, Detroit and Pittsburgh, but to no avail. Reasons given for rejecting blacks included that this was a white man's war, whites would not fight alongside black soldiers and blacks would not or could not fight. Another reason—not readily admitted—was that accepting a black man as a soldier meant that he would be free and must then be considered an equal.

By late 1862 attitudes began to change. The north was becoming disheartened about the long casualty lists and escalating costs of the war. Objections to using black soldiers decreased. Discontent also surfaced among many high-ranking Union commanders. In 1862, without Federal sanction, three U.S. Army department commanders organized and committed to battle several black regiments in South Carolina, Kansas and Louisiana. Finally, the 1 January 1863 issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation opened the doors for blacks Americans to become soldiers in the northern armies.

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Recruiting for black regiments began immediately. Most northern states adjusted their laws to accommodate the use of black soldiers, and some, like Massachusetts, began raising black regiments. Several other states, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Connecticut, quickly followed suit.

This was not the case in Michigan. In 1862 the legislature had passed laws prohibiting the enlistment of black men in its militia, further delaying the recruiting of a black regiment. During the interim the state was swamped by aggressive recruiting teams from other northern states, and Michigan black men enlisted in large numbers elsewhere.

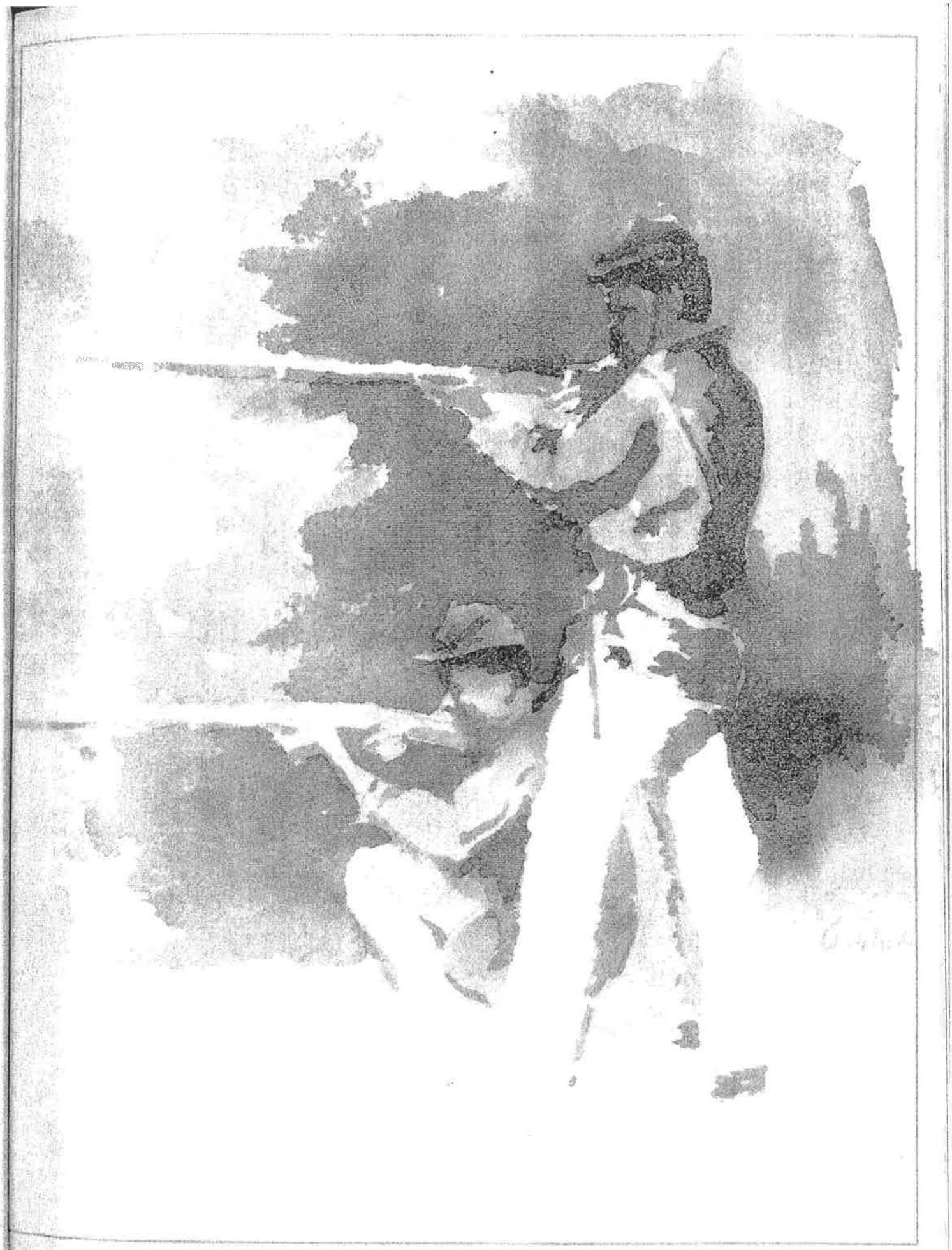
It did not take long for black citizens and their white friends in Michigan to begin mobilizing support for raising a black regiment. Many black men, well-known for their views and leadership roles, became extremely active. Among them were George de Baptiste, John D. Richards, William Lambert, William Webb and Dr. Joseph Ferguson. Clergymen of both races were also active. Mass meetings throughout the state were held in black churches where nationally-known figures exhorted the people. Such gatherings occurred at Detroit's Second Baptist Church and the Lafayette Street African Methodist Episcopal Church. Many prominent citizens, organizations and one of Michigan's most powerful newspapers exerted political pressure to raise a black regiment. However, the Democrats and Republicans held broad differences of opinion on the use of black soldiers.

The *Detroit Free Press*, the political organ for the Democratic party, generally villified the black race. It extolled the black stereotype as lazy and shiftless, editorially warning that southern blacks were going to move in wholesale numbers into northern cities, take over all the jobs, raise the crime rate and demand social equality. In May 1863 the *Free Press* declared, "The city is being over run by Negroes." This was a ridiculous claim since Wayne County's entire population of 75,284 included only 1,570 black residents.

The Republican party and the *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune* usually took positions favorable to blacks. The *Tribune* strongly supported efforts to raise a black regiment. Editor Henry Barns held forceful abolitionist sentiments and was reputed to be a leading supporter of the Underground Railroad. Barns proved to be a tireless advocate in the fight to gain a black regiment for Michigan, and according to Michigan historian Norman McRae, "without his efforts, there would not have been a [Michigan] Negro regiment."

Barns also undertook persistent editorial and political efforts that soon proved successful. After Barns lamented in an editorial on 16 April 1863 that two hundred men were enlisted in Detroit for the 54th Massachusetts Colored Infantry, he directed his energies toward the power structure in Washington. On 24 July 1863, Michigan Governor Austin Blair confirmed in a letter to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton that Barns had applied for authority to raise a regiment of colored troops in Michigan. On August 12, Michigan Adjutant General John Robertson informed Barns that he was "fully authorized and empowered to raise and organize such a regiment."

Enlistments were for three years or the war's duration. Pay was ten dollars per month; three dollars was deducted from the monthly pay for clothing. (White soldiers were paid thirteen dollars per month, with no such deduction.) Unlike the enlisted men, officers in black units were authorized the same pay as officers of white regiments.



Barns accepted a commission as colonel of the new regiment, designated the 1st Michigan Colored Infantry. Recruiting began immediately at Camp Ward, located near an army barracks on Clinton Street in Detroit. The selection and certification of commissioned officers (all white) by the secretary of war, followed regulations. Appointments were made as each company was mustered into service, and all officers were required to appear before examining boards in Cincinnati or Washington, DC.

When the regiment was mustered into federal service on 17 February 1864, its officers compared well with those in other regiments. Most, except for Colonel Barns, had seen active service and many were from Michigan. Lieutenant Colonel William T. Bennett hailed from South Carolina; chief surgeon Wesley Vincent and chaplain William Waring were from Oberlin, Ohio (the location of the first college in the North that admitted black students equally with whites). Staff officers included Major Newcome Clark of Clarkston, Adjutant James A. McKnight of Ann Arbor and Quartermaster Patrick McLaughlin, of Detroit. Two of the company commanders later became well-known judges following the war: Captains Edward Cahill of St. Johns and Jonathan B. Tuttle of Alpena. Other regimental officers hailed from Bath, Ypsilanti, Lowell, Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo.

Impediments to organizing a black Michigan regiment included enticements by recruiting agents from other states, the unequal pay with white soldiers, the generally hostile environment in Detroit and the conditions at Camp Ward.

Initially, recruiting did not proceed as rapidly or smoothly as anticipated. Impediments included continued enticement by recruiting agents from other states, unequal pay, the generally hostile environment in Detroit and Michigan for black soldiers, discrimination, no rights to citizenship or voting, segregation and the deplorable living conditions at Camp Ward. One report indicated that "the barracks were unfit for human habitation and there is not a barn or pig-sty in the whole city of Detroit that is not better fitted for human habitation than Camp Ward."

Despite the many difficulties, recruiting improved and the exacting and serious training program left the new soldiers little time to complain. Early in October 1863 the first of many interactions with the public occurred. Church groups from Detroit conducted Sunday services at Camp Ward and were invited to witness dress parades in the afternoon. During one such parade the recruits showed "good proficiency in drill, stepping to the music of the drum like veterans." The *Tribune* further noted, "They make very cheerful, obedient soldiers and will be an honor to the State of Michigan."

Famous dignitaries visiting the camp included Sojourner Truth, the fiery orator and abolitionist leader, who spent two days intermingling with the soldiers, preaching at church services and speaking with the men individually and in groups. Local citizens also made contributions to the regiment. After learning that fifteen members of the 1st Michigan had formed a band, J. Henry Whittemore donated $528 for "instruments manufactured expressly for this band." In January 1864 the Colored Ladies Society presented a set of colors to the regiment in a ceremony at Camp Ward.

Near the end of 1863 the 1st Michigan made a successful railroad tour of communites in the southern Lower Peninsula. Stops were made at Ypsilanti, Ann Arbor, Jackson, Kalamazoo, Marshall, Cassopolis and Niles. At all the locations, the men were well-received and their newly-formed band won many accolades. After a review in Jackson, Governor Blair declared, "This is the first time I ever saw Negro troops and I am very proud of your general bearing. Take courage and do your duty nobly."

The tour created a favorable impression among other Michiganians who had never seen black soldiers. The men who had been on the tour were pleased with their success, but jubilation turned to anger and discouragement at the deplorable conditions of their barracks at Camp Ward. Despite initial frantic efforts by the staff to improve the living quarters, the situation changed little. On other occasions the men of the 1st suffered other indignities.

In March 1864 the 10th Michigan Infantry refused to march behind the black band at a parade welcoming the return of another Michigan regiment home. The *Free Press* noted, "The declaration that the colored band is superior to the band will only be received by those who consider that an African is a little better than a white man." The *Tribune* reported that the white band's price was exorbitant and since the black band "could furnish as good, if not better music, they were requested and patriotically offered their service for a nominal sum."

Frequent altercations also occurred between the black soldiers and Detroit civilians in saloons, stores and on the

city's streets. Newspaper accounts were highly critical of their behavior and inflammatory and derisive headlines were common. "Raid of the First Ethiopians;" "Unruly Soldiers of the 1st Colored Infantry Attack Patrons in Detroit Saloons"—and of a dance given at a public hall—"Grand Artillery Shake Down—The Colored Citizens and Soldiers Indulged in a 'Hop.'" Generally, most incidents were not as horrendous as reported and probably not any different from those involving other regiments in the area.

Despite these developments, Colonel Barns intensified the vigorous training program. Officers and noncommissioned officers worked well together in molding a closer relationship between themselves and the men in instilling an *esprit de corps*.

Typical of the regiment's noncommissioned officers was Parker Ben, who had served as a cook in the officers' mess at Fort Wayne. He also had listened to the officers' discussions about tactics and strategy and observed their conduct of drill and field exercises. He joined the 1st Michigan on 16 September 1863 and was soon promoted to sergeant major, serving in that capacity until the war's end.

When the 1st Michigan Colored Infantry arrived in Annapolis, Maryland, it was raining heavily. However, the men were denied permission to use empty barracks because of potential trouble with white soldiers stationed there.

On 11 February 1864 a full review was held on Woodward Avenue. A week later the 1st Michigan was mustered into federal service with an enrollment of 895 officers and men. On March 28 the 1st Michigan entrained for Annapolis, Maryland. Predictably, the *Free Press* proclaimed, "The First Regiment of the Corps d' Afrique took their departure from the city. Its departure secures the peace and tranquility of our city."

It was raining heavily when the 1st Michigan arrived in Annapolis. There they were denied permission to use some empty barracks because of potential trouble with white troops stationed there. Their disappointment vanished the next day when, after passing in review, they were highly praised by Generals U.S. Grant and Ambrose Burnside.

On 12 April 1864, Colonel Barns resigned and command passed to Henry L. Chipman, who was promoted to colonel. A former regular army officer who had seen action, Chipman led the regiment throughout the rest of the war.

On April 19 after a long ride on transports, the 1st Michigan arrived at Hilton Head, South Carolina. On May 23 its designation was changed to the 102nd United States Colored Troops (U.S.C.T.) and control was transferred from the state of Michigan to the army's newly created Bureau for Colored Troops.

The true test of any regiment is its performance on the battlefield. That is where the questions "Can they fight?" and "Will they fight?" must be answered. The men of the 102nd U.S.C.T. responded with a proud "yes!"

Most of the regiment's combat operations did not involve the entire regiment, a common practice for newly formed black (and some white) units. The 102nd spent approximately thirteen months on picket or outpost duty, which usually meant minimal contact with the enemy; six months in direct combat, usually in small units. About six months were spent in marching or travelling on trains and transports. The entire field duty was in Florida, South Carolina and Georgia; most of the time they were surrounded, and often outnumbered, by Confederate troops so that even fatigue duty and working on fortifications required constant combat preparedness.

After the 102nd arrived at Hilton Head, detachments were sent to picket duty on St. Helena and Jenkins islands, and at Seabrook and Spanish Wells on Hilton Head Island. After a few weeks, the regiment occupied Port Royal and was assigned to fatigue duty and construction of fortifications. On August 1 it was sent to Jacksonville, Florida. The next day, following a twenty-one-mile march to Baldwin, the regiment did more picket duty and destroyed railroad tracks. When suddenly attacked by a strong rebel cavalry force, the Michiganians stood their ground, repulsing and driving the enemy from the field.

On August 15 the 102nd began a long march through eastern Florida, ending at Magnolia on the St. John River, where it spent ten days building fortifications and on fatigue duty. It embarked on transports arriving at Beaufort, South Carolina, on August 31. In September it was sent to different points on Coosa and Port Royal. In October the enemy attempted to surprise the rebel garrison at Lady's Island, but were repulsed and driven from the field.

In November and December detachments of the 102nd were involved in heavy fighting as parts of larger Union forces. Union General William T. Sherman ordered the destruction of the Charleston and Savannah Railroad around Pocotaligo and a division of five-thousand men, commanded by General John P. Hatch, was formed. Three

of the 1st brigade's regiments were black—the 32nd, 34th and 35th U.S.C.T. The 2nd Brigade was composed of four black regiments, the 54th and 55th Massachusetts and the 26th and 102nd U.S.C.T.

The 102nd detachment consisted of 12 officers and 300 men and on November 30 a correspondent noted, "Here our forces sustained a charge and charged in return. In this affair the 102nd covered itself with glory[,] our regiment maintained the steadiest line of battle and fought with the greatest determination of any troops. The wounded refused to go to the rear, but kept on fighting."

With greater strength and firepower, the Confederates overcame the Union defenses and a general retreat was ordered. In front of the 102nd sector three cannon were abandoned. Men from Company D of the 102nd rushed forward to recover them, but were beaten back with heavy losses, including the death of Captain Arad E. Lindsay.

Lieutenant Orson W. Bennett then gathered thirty men around him and again attacked the enemy. After several unsuccessful efforts to recover the artillery pieces, Bennett "gallantly led a small force fully 100 yards in advance of the Union lines and brought in the guns, preventing their capture." Bennett was one of two officers of the 102nd awarded the U.S. Congressional Medal of Honor.

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In December 1864 the 102nd—fighting alongside white regiments and the 54th Massachusetts—experienced heavy fighting at the Tillifinny River. On December 7 they were attacked by a strong force, but repulsed the enemy with heavy casualties. The following day the 102nd was one of several regiments that attempted to destroy the railroad.

In January 1865 the companies on duty at outposts returned to Beaufort. In late January the entire regiment moved to Pocotaligo. On February 7 the 54th Massachusetts and the 102nd crossed the Salkehatchie River, marching at night in a heavy rainstorm and drove the enemy out of their barricades and fortifications. On January 8 companies B, E and I, commanded by Major Clark, made a reconnaissance near Cuckold's Creek. A rebel cavalry picket was attacked and forced to withdraw behind their works. Having destroyed the railroad and breastworks, the 102nd remained there until February 14. After a series of marches and skirmishes, it arrived at the defenses at Charleston, then on March 9 took transports to Savannah, Georgia, where the two wings of the regiment were rejoined.

Two detachments were again formed, one commanded by Colonel Chipman; the other by Major Clark. Between April 11 and 18, Chipman's wing participated on a hazardous expedition from Charleston, to join a union force on the Santee River at Nelson's Ferry, seventy miles away. They marched through enemy territory where they met and drove off a large cavalry force after a brisk and vigorous fight. Another lively engagement near Camden also ended in victory. Major Clark's detachment moved out on April 5; following a hard march and minor skirmishes the Michiganians met the enemy in great force at Boykins. Working with the 54th Massachusetts, it flanked the rebels, spiritedly attacked them and drove them in great disorder toward Statesburg. The next day the two detachments of the 102nd were reunited and executed a successful flank movement in a skirmish at Singleton's Plantation. These actions resulted in forcing a panicked enemy to abandon its strongly fortified position. On the morning of April 21, Companies A, B and C, under the command of Major Clark, were attacked by two hundred rebels. After a lively skirmish the rebels retreated with heavy losses.

This action ended the regiment's combat record. In late May 1865 the 102nd was on occupation duty at Summerville, Branchville, Orangeburg and Winnsboro, South Carolina. In September the Michiganians returned to Charleston where they were mustered out of federal service on September 30. The men of the 102nd were disbanded in Detroit on 17 October 1865.

The regiment's total enrollment included 1,673 men. Losses totaled five killed in action, seven dead of wounds, and 118 dead of disease.

Eleven black soldiers who served in the 102nd are buried in Detroit's Elmwood Cemetery. In death they are not segregated, as they were in life. □

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MICHIGAN HISTORY CHECKLIST

Walnut Pickles and Watermelon Cakes: A Century of Michigan Cooking.

By Larry B. Massie and Priscilla Massie.

(Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990. 354pp. Illus. Cloth, $29.95.)

The Massies have collected over 1,500 Michigan recipes from the past century in this historical and culinary treasure. Anecdotes, illustrations and household admonitions, interspersed with historic recipes, delight and intrigue the reader—pleasing both palate and mind. Order from the publisher, The Leonard N. Simons Building, 5959 Woodward Avenue, Detroit, MI 48202.

The Diary of Bishop Frederic Baraga: The First Bishop of Marquette, Michigan.

Edited by Regis M. Walling and Rev. N. Daniel Rupp.

(Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990. 339pp. Illus. Cloth, $35.00.)

Frederic Baraga attempted to Christianize the Indians of the Old Northwest. His diary begins with his appointment as bishop of the Upper Peninsula. This native Slovenian's entries document both his life as bishop and the midnineteenth century life of the Great Lakes region. The Walling and Rupp edition of Baraga's diary supplements, with extensive documentation, a biographical sketch of Baraga, passages from Baraga's letters and vignettes. Order from the publisher, The Leonard N. Simons Building, 5959 Woodward Avenue, Detroit, MI 48202.

The Politics of Plant Closings.

By John Portz.

(Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1990. 224pp. Cloth, $29.95; paper, $12.95, plus $2.00 postage and handling.)

Plant closings as detrimental to the economy of plant-dependent cities is the thesis of this text. Political scientist Portz focuses on the problems of plant closings in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, Louisville, Kentucky, and Waterloo, Iowa, and the solutions local governments have utilized and can use to meet the crises. Portz's study synthesizes urban politics and political economy literature and analyzes the action taken by the cities to solve any possible economic dilemmas caused by plant closings. Order from the publisher, 829 Carruth, Lawrence, KS 66045.

Roses in the Snow.

By Carrie Howlet.

(Privately printed, 1989. 129pp. Illus. Paper. $10.00, postage paid.)

The author recounts her childhood years during the turn of the century in this delightful narrative. Order from the author, Star Route, Bruce Crossing, MI 49912.

American Historical Pageantry.

By David Glassberg.

(Chapel Hill, NC, 1990. 381pp. Illus. Cloth, $45.00; paper, $14.95, plus shipping and handling fees.)

A pageantry craze inundated the early twentieth century. Town histories were reenacted by thousands of Americans who participated in civic celebrations of their pasts. Glassberg examines this phenomenon, which peaked between 1910 and 1917, revealing the pageantry's fundamental elements, its cultural, social and political effects and its evolvement from the 1900s to the 1930s. Order from the publisher, Box 2288, Chapel Hill, NC 27515-2288.

Seasons of Grace: A History of the Catholic Archdiocese of Detroit.

By Leslie Woodcock Tentler.

(Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990. 613pp. Illus. Cloth, $45.00.)

Seasons of Grace is an expansive history of Detroit's Catholic church and Catholic community from the 1830s to the 1950s. Tentler studies the clerical successions and institutional expansion of the Catholic church, the sociocultural changes of the Catholic community and additional aspects of Catholicism. More than just a local history text, the broad scope of this study contributes to the entire history of American Catholicism. Order from the publisher, The Leonard M. Simons Building, 5959 Woodward Avenue, Detroit, MI 48202.

Church and City in Transition: The Social Composition of Religious Groups in Detroit, 1880-1940.

By Ralph Janis.

(New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1990. 296pp. Cloth, $60.00)

As Detroit evolved into a leading American city, its social and religious life interacted and influenced the city's emerging social behavior. According to Ralph Janis, groups of different social, ethnic and religious backgrounds interacted despite the appearance of separation and division. This intermixing relied upon several major determinants and their order of influence, such as race, occupation, religion, ethnicity and neighborhood. Janis concludes that though Detroit was not a "melting pot," it was not as "culturally plural" as commonly believed. Order from the publisher, 136 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016.

The Michigan History Checklist is prepared by editorial assistant Sharon McIlaney. Send two copies of review books to Editor, *Michigan History Magazine*, Department of State, Lansing, MI 48918, with the following information: location and name of publisher, price, shipping costs and the supplier's address.